Chapter 8:

Carlsbad Caverns in the Post-War Era

By the end of World War II, Carlsbad Caverns had become an important tourist destination for Americans. It enjoyed a special symbolism with the widest swath of the national public, a resonance that remained steady in a changing American culture. A trip to Carlsbad embodied the most attractive dimensions of post-war American dreams: the freedom and means to travel in pursuit of personal objectives, in this case the ability to visit a much-acclaimed wonder. The windshield stickers that Ray V. Davis created became bumper stickers that touted the Carlsbad experience, markers of participation in the affluence and optimism that served as the basis for post-war America's transformation.[1]

The Park Service matured after World War II, relinquishing its claim as the primary federal agency in the West for a comfortable position within the federal bureaucracy as first the Bureau of Reclamation and later the departments of Defense and Energy dominated the regional scene. With enormous bipartisan support for its development goals — including a decade-long capital development program between 1956 and 1966 called MISSION 66, the growing importance of recreation as an activity, and a clear link between national park visitation and patriotic feeling and participation, the Park Service moved far from its roots. The agency professionalized in a number of remarkable ways. The large number of GI Bill-educated scientists who joined the agency in the 1950s and 1960s changed its entire tenor. Before 1945, the Park Service was an organization dominated by landscape architects. It then became first an agency led by scientists, and later a people-management agency in which law enforcement became the primary objective.[2]

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[1] Nymeyer and Halliday, *Carlsbad Cavern: The Early Years*, 64.

[2] Rothman, *Devil's Bargains,* 112-37; Foresta, *America's National Parks and Their Keepers,* 43-90; Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks,* 200-15.

The agency and its goals also became politicized in new ways in the post-war era. This trend started in an innocuous fashion, but soon external political situations determined the patterns it would follow. The replacement of George Hartzog, Jr., a career Park Service employee, as director after Richard M. Nixon's election in 1972 with campaign operative Ronald Walker signaled a new kind of agency politics. The directorship had never been a political post; Walker's appointment altered the intellectual terrain for the people who made up the core of the agency. They had always regarded the Park Service as insulated from political machinations. Walker's appointment inaugurated a decade-long shift that left many career employees confused and dispirited.[3]

Another dimension to the Park Service's politicization occurred in the process of adding new parks. The agency historically experienced great control over the choice of areas for inclusion in the system. This held even beyond the short-lived Walker directorship. Rarely were national park areas of any significance proclaimed without the agency's support, with Congress and the Department of the Interior showing great trust in agency standards. A dramatic change in how park areas were established took shape beginning in the middle of the 1970. U.S. Representative A. Philip Burton of California's Fifth District began to use parks as part of omnibus bills to assure the support of otherwise recalcitrant congressional representatives. This practice, called "park-barreling," reached an apex in omnibus bills in 1978 and 1980, adding a significant number of parks without agency input and, in some situations, over strenuous agency objections.[4] By 1980, the Park Service struggled for control of the park establishment process, a terrain crucial to the agency's sense of identity and well-being.

Against this backdrop, Carlsbad Caverns National Park rose to a pinnacle, but by 1980, the beginning of a problematic future became apparent. In the great expansive post-war moment – the "Great Aberration" of prosperity that began shortly after the end of World War II and continued until the combination of post-Vietnam War inflation and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil embargo in 1974 initiated a twenty-two-year decline in the real value of wages – Carlsbad Caverns represented the attainment of American ideals. Its role as geologic curiosity expanded into a designation as a mid-century wonder. In 1903, Theodore Roosevelt said of the Grand Canyon: "It is a place that every American, if he can travel, should see." By the 1970s, Carlsbad Caverns had joined that category for the broader, automobile-based traveling public. It had become an indicator of belonging to the expanding middle class, a site that Americans had to see if only to think of themselves as enjoying the fruits of post-war society's opulence.[5]

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[3] Foresta, *America's National Parks and Their Keepers*, 68-83.

[4] John Jacobs, *A Rage For Justice: The Passion and Politics of Phillip Burton* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 356-79; Joanne Robinson, *You're in Your Mother's Arms: The Life and Legacy of Congressman Phil Burton* (San Francisco: Mary Judith Robinson, 1994), 227-46.

[5] Rothman, *Devil's Bargains*, 188-200.

> After World War II, Carlsbad Caverns underwent a series of transformations that redefined what visitors experienced when they came to the great caverns along the Permian Uplift. The Park Service now framed its wonders differently. The showmanship that often characterized early park interpretation had been superseded by the more serious efforts of the Education Division. Increasingly, the Park Service sought to use the national parks to convey the kinds of positive sentiments about American society and progress that characterized the world's fairs of the pre-World War I era. National parks became a mass experience, coveted by the American mainstream. By the 1950s, automobile travelers with two weeks each year of vacation who chose to experience the nation through its parks, almost always with their children in tow, looked to the Park Service to make their visitor experience culturally as well as emotionally uplifting.

As the emphasis on education grew in the Park Service and as national parks came to represent a form of affirmation of U.S. life in the post-war period, the range of offerings that agency leadership would tolerate narrowed. Since its inception, the Park Service strove to be regarded as serious, but there was always a little of the snake-oil salesmanship in the agency's makeup, especially at smaller and more remote parks. In part, such promotion-oriented people were attracted to the agency; in part, survival at a remote park depended on making it important. As a result, the agency tolerated a range of practices that might not always have fit within the guidelines of written policies. Curtailing these became a priority in the professionalizing climate of the post-war era.

At Carlsbad Caverns National Park, Thomas Boles remained the superintendent until 1946. He represented the older Park Service, one of the generalized jacks-of-all-trades who would do anything for their parks, often without going through channels or consulting agency policy. The inveterate Boles was the consummate showman. He never met a form of media he could not embrace. Throughout the 1930s, he found himself in trouble with Horace Albright and the Washington, D.C., office of the Park Service, but with the division of the agency into regions in 1935 and New Deal money and programs dominating agency attention, Boles was able to remain in his capacity at Carlsbad Caverns with little oversight well into the 1940s. As did many superintendents on the peripheries, Boles learned to do just enough required paperwork to keep out of trouble with his superiors. As World War II escalated, more vexing problems such as maintenance, resources, and workpower dominated the horizons of the Park Service, and Boles retained a remarkable degree of independence.

One issue impaled Thomas Boles between the National Park Service's past and its future: the Rock of Ages ceremony he routinely offered on his cavern tours. Boles insisted on guided tours of the caverns long after it ceased to be feasible; he wanted two tours a day, at 10:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., so that he personally could offer visitors the benefit of his expertise. The crowds were often huge — numbering as many as 600 — and Boles' winning personality and flamboyance kept them captivated. To promote the park, Boles was purported to break off stalagmites from rock formations and pass them out to tour visitors. Park Service observers cringed when they heard of this practice and Boles

was ordered to stop.[6] The Rock of Ages ceremony was the zenith of his tour, the moment that visitors anticipated with excitement. Boles would stop a tour group in "a natural amphitheater facing a huge stalagmite — the Rock of Ages, said to be the oldest in the world," Ford Sibley wrote in one tour account used by the Southern Pacific Railroad in its promotions. At the Rock of Ages formation, Boles asked visitors to sit. As he waited, people put out their cigarettes and shushed their children. The whispering soon stopped. Boles thanked everyone for coming to Carlsbad Caverns, and offered a talk that was part fantasy, part fiction, and pure hyperbole. "Many years ago, three or four distinguished geologists met at the base of that formation, computed its volume and estimated its age," Boles told his audience. "And fittingly chose the name Rock of Ages." He cautioned them that when the cavern lights went out they would be in total and complete darkness for the first time in their lives. " As the lights dimmed, Sibley said, "A solid blackness covered everything. I peered around and waved my hand before my eyes. There was no sensation of sight at all. I was alone, underground, and totally blind." After what seemed forever, but Sibley later decided was less than a minute, a small glow appeared. "I could hear the Rangers singing. And as the light advanced up the Big Room, jumping from rock to rock and wall to wall, the music swelled louder: 'Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me.' When the song reached its loudest, the lights were full on again and the Big Room was bright as day." Boles then finished his talk, saying: "I know in my mind that the heavens above can't be any more beautiful than the Carlsbad Caverns of New Mexico."[7]

The Rock of Ages ceremony hung between the enthusiastic past of the Park Service and its increasingly professional future. In many ways, so did Boles. When Jim White, Ray Davis, and others first attracted public interest to the cavern, they promoted it in a manner that anticipated Boles. The superintendent was only the most skilled practitioner, one more conversant with the needs of the nation among a group that loved the caverns and would do anything to attract attention to it. Of them, only Boles even nodded toward the NPS concept of standards. By the 1940s, the flashy approach was passe, even embarrassing for an agency moving rapidly toward professionalization. With specialization becoming common in the aftermath of the New Deal and an entire generation of the post-war college educated, often returning veterans funded by the G.I. Bill, the Park Service regarded its activities with greater seriousness than before. The centralizing of authority that the New Deal promoted was also reflected in the agency, although as the Park Service professionalized, standardization became a watchword.[8]

Boles found himself in a complicated position. Facing much negative attention from Albright during the 1930s, he learned how to function with maximum autonomy within a growing bureaucracy.

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[6] F. A. Kittredge to the Director, December 8, 1931; Horace M. Albright to Thomas Boles, December 15, 1931, NA, RG 79, Central Classified Files, Carlsbad Caverns.

[7] Ford Sibley, "My Trip Through Carlsbad Caverns," (Southern Pacific Railroad, 1946); "Colonel Boles' Rock of Ages Talk," Carlsbad Caverns Library, Carlsbad Caverns National Park.

[8] Rothman, *Preserving Different Pasts*, 212-32; Frank Williss and Harlan D. Unruh, *The National Park Service and the New Deal*, 1-11.

Boles became adept at doing just enough of the routine administrative work to avoid scrutiny from superiors. He gave up none of the prerogatives of the old Park Service, where superintendents had enormous control over their domain. In some ways, Boles' autonomy remained problematic. The culture of the agency supported this entrepreneurial, Progressive-era style, although not always to the extent that Boles pushed it. The longer an individual had been associated with the Park Service, the easier it was to look at Boles and see a cheerful anachronism that could be allowed to continue. As long as the direct line of succession from Mather to Albright to Cammerer continued, complaints about Boles were restricted to his limited administrative repertoire. With the ascent of Newton B. Drury, the former president of the Save-the-Redwoods League, to the directorship in 1941, Boles' position began to deteriorate.[9]

The Rock of Ages ceremony became the test case for a new professional Park Service ethic. From the Educational Division to the scientists, agency leaders regarded the cavern ceremony as the worst the Park Service could offer. The growth of professionalism made Boles and his show anachronistic. Since the inception of the Educational Division in the 1930s, agency leaders made the commitment to use the national parks to uplift the public, not titillate or pander. The efforts to make visitor responses to the Grand Canyon intellectual rather than emotional offered one end of this spectrum. The construction of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in St. Louis, which commemorated a hard past in a hard time, presented the other. Nowhere in between could be tolerated a ritual the Park Service regarded as blatantly low brow as the Rock of Ages ceremony.

Boles' problems with the Rock of Ages Ceremony began with the ever-inquisitive Horace M. Albright, by the early 1940s a fixture with U.S. Potash and a frequent visitor to the Carlsbad area. The former NPS director had never been entirely comfortable with the level of sideshow at Carlsbad Caverns National Park, but over the years he had grown to appreciate Boles. The combination of Boles, Charles White, and Jim White had always made him anxious. During the 1930s, the thought of Boles in particular often made Albright cringe. Nor could Albright leave the Park Service and simply let go. Despite his long and successful career outside the agency, in his mind he never really left. The Park Service had been his formative experience, the place where he learned the privileges and responsibilities of power. It remained close to his heart. His constant stream of letters both enlightened and vexed successors well into the 1970s. Until the mid-1950s, Albright retained considerable political influence from his venerated tenure and his close relationships with Republicans and Democrats alike. The same astute maneuvering that so benefitted the Park Service during Albright's years with the agency made him a constant and sometimes sharply critical observer from the outside.[10]

Carlsbad Caverns National Park had never been everything it should to Horace Albright, and from his position at U.S. Potash, he staged an ongoing campaign to bring it up to his insisted standards.

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[9] Susan Schrepfer, *The Fight to Save the Redwoods: A History of Environmental Reform, 1917-1978* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 1-45; Ise, *Our National Park Policy*, 443-516.

[10] Swain, *Wilderness Defender*, 239-56.

In many ways, he singled out Carlsbad Caverns National Park. He knew of its idiosyncracies from his days as director and the potash mines in the Carlsbad area brought him consistently closer to the park than to many others. His ongoing laments to the often ineffectual Cammerer and the activist Drury revealed his fears. "It is regrettable," Albright wrote in 1942, "that [Charley] White . . . has permitted a great number of old buildings to stand along the road with the roofs off and windows and doors out." The entrance to the park needed marking to differentiate it from White's camp, he recommended. Similar situations provided some of Albright's most difficult moments as director; from outside the agency, he regarded them with even less alacrity.[11]

After the 1930s, when Albright harshly criticized Boles, the former director softened. The context of World War II and the need to lift civilian and military morale increased Albright's appreciation of Boles' gifts, and only someone of far less inventiveness than Albright could dismiss the enormous good Boles accomplished with the superintendent's fundamental overzealousness. A 1942 letter revealed Albright's new appreciation. Not only had the cavern trails never been in better condition, he wrote, but the lunchroom was clean and the service good. Carlsbad Caverns filled the function of parks during wartime, becoming a place that symbolized national solidarity, sacrifice, and patriotism. For Albright, far more susceptible during the war to the pull of emotion than he had been as director, the Rock of Ages ceremony, performed for military personnel completing training at the Carlsbad airbase, was now an inspiring moment.[12] The tough Albright showed a more flexible side, condoning a practice that he found questionable under different circumstances.

The Park Service moved to become more professional even under the difficult situations of war. Drury played a significant role. He was the first true preservationist to take the reins of the agency and the first from a professional conservation background. He also opposed grandstanding in any form, insisting that the national parks offer a solemn, educational experience. The early directors wielded great power, and wartime limitations enhanced Drury's position. Drury did not share Albright's new perspective on Boles and the Rock of Ages ceremony, and when a parade of visitor complaints during the war highlighted management problems at Carlsbad, Drury moved to bring the park in line with his vision of the agency.[13]

The rash of visitor complaints revealed two major categories of problems to a committee led by regional naturalist Natt N. Dodge and including landscape architect Charles Kell and assistant park superintendent John H. "Jack" Diehl. Visitors regarded park facilities as inadequate. They complained about everything from the long wait for the elevator to the lack of a comfortable area to wait before the tour began. Even more significant, the complaints focused on problems of service and people management. Visitors felt that rangers impinged on their ability to enjoy the park. Guides were called

[11] Horace M. Albright to Newton B. Drury, November 18, 1942, NA, RG 79, Series 7, Carlsbad Caverns National Park.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Newton Drury, Memorandum for Regional Director, May 6, 1943, NA, RG 79, Series 7, Carlsbad Caverns.

"officious" and "discourteous," heresy within the culture of the Park Service. Some visitors referred to the guides' techniques for crowd management as "herding."[14] In a park renowned for its visitor service located in an agency obsessed with public relations, such a situation demanded quick attention.

The solutions to such problems were relatively obvious, but they led to questions about the need for certain kinds of programs. Some problems could be addressed in the short term; these involved the park practices of agency personnel and visitor management. Larger problems, such as questions of facilities and access pointed out earlier by Albright, would have to wait until resources for development could again be found at the end of the war. Of all the problems, Dodge and his committee regarded the herding of visitors as the most telling, but resolvable within the existing practices of the park. In addition, the rangers' practice of challenging visitors by suggesting that riding the elevator out of the canyon was only for "sissies" needed to come to an immediate end.[15]

Director Newton B. Drury did not agree. The most closely tied to the ethic of preservation of any Park Service leader, Drury envisioned a more sedate, more educational form of interpretation at Carlsbad Caverns National Park. With input from Ned Burns, chief of the Park Service's Museum Division, who judged the Rock of Ages ceremony " a cheap theatrical quality out of harmony with the natural beauty of the Caverns … Which arbitrarily limited the number of trips into the Caverns," Drury halted the ceremony. "We do not favor the Rock of Ages ceremony," he wrote Regional Director Minor R. Tillotson in 1944. "Especially do we object to the orientation of the program of cave trips around this ceremony … Artificial intrusions in the cavern must be held to an absolute minimum." Unlike Dodge, Drury regarded the problems in the caverns as results of existing practices. The emphasis of interpretation needed to change, the director believed, and in a September 12, 1944 memorandum he ordered a provisional end to the Rock of Ages ceremony. The ceremony was officially discontinued December 5, 1944.[16]

Drury emerged as the great opponent of the Rock of Ages ceremony, but Albright's past criticism of the park drew Drury's attention to it. Albright had made his peace with concepts such as the Rock of Ages ceremony. From his businessman's perspective and under the circumstances of the war, he could see its significance. Albright feared the mundane; in a world in flames and with a nearby military presence, there was little banal about any inspirational moment. Drury focused on the forms and nature of what had become a park ritual. Although he surely recognized its spiritual value, Drury regarded the Rock of Ages ceremony as the source from which each of the park's management problems stemmed. Drury was prescient. The complaints of visitors about the way they were "herded" all pointed to the

[14] Natt N. Dodge, Memorandum for the Regional Director, Region Three, September 22, 1943, NA, RG 79, Series 7, Carlsbad Caverns.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Newton B. Drury, Memorandum for the Regional Director, Region Three, May 6, 1944, NA, RG 79, Series 7, Carlsbad Caverns; Newton B. Drury, Memorandum for the Regional Director, Region Three, September 12, 1944; N. J. Burns, Memo for the Director, January 19, 1945, NA, RG 79, Series 7, Carlsbad Caverns.

practices that the Rock of Ages ceremony made necessary: the large and intermittent tours, the crowded "bottlenecking," and the long waits all resulted from the way the ceremony was offered. To Drury, by the end of 1944 envisioning a post-war future with much greater levels of visitation, such practices were anachronistic at best and more likely counterproductive. With Ickes' support — Drury was Ickes' hand-picked choice for Park Service leadership — the experimental end to the ceremony became permanent.[17]

The decision to end the Rock of Ages ceremony produced one of the most consistent and long-lived bursts of public opposition that the Park Service experienced prior to the 1960s. There had always been opponents of national parks and of the Park Service — local interests and even powerful politicians such as Ralph Henry Cameron, the Republican senator from Arizona who created trouble for the agency over the Grand Canyon during the 1920s. What set apart the firestorm that followed the termination of the Rock of Ages ceremony was that it came from friends of the Park Service. A range of people, including Secretary Ickes and New Mexico's Democratic senators Dennis Chavez and Carl Hatch received complaints — from ministers, businessmen, ordinary travelers, and almost every other constituency among the respectable in America.[18] The people who supported the agency since the days of Stephen T. Mather spoke; they wanted the Rock of Ages ceremony, no matter what Drury and others in the agency thought.

Carlsbad Caverns provided a different experience than watching Old Faithful erupt, seeing the view from Mather Point, viewing Tower Falls, or even gazing at El Capitan in Yosemite National Park. It had more in common with feeding bears in other parks, thought Natt Dodge, an activity that stressed the individual visitor more than the feature itself.[19] To the many who protested the end of the Rock of Ages ceremony, the event, not the cavern itself, was the most powerful memory of their experience. The ceremony made their trip special. Here was meaning and significance, emotion and feeling rolled into one. Here was nature subordinate to human imagination and manipulation, a wondrous place made significant not by a sophisticated and discrete template as in faux historic communities such as Santa Fe, New Mexico, but by brazen and direct orchestration that appealed to the most meaningful and at the same time most contrived emotions Americans possessed. The Rock of Ages possessed a poignancy that moved people, especially during World War II. It provided solemn testimony that there was a spiritual dimension to life at a time when temporal concerns dominated everything.

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[17] Swain, *Wilderness Defender*, 244-47; Superintendent's Monthly Report, December 1944, Carlsbad Cavern National Park Library; Ise, *Our National Park Policy*.

[18] B. J. Lynch to Director, National Park Service, February 7, 1945; Jay F. Strawiniski to Thomas R. Boles, March 28, 1945; Thomas R. Boles to Jay F. Strawiniski, April 7, 1945; Rev. James D. Wiliford to Harold L. Ickes, April 18, 1945; Mrs. John C. Koster to U.S. Sen. Dennis Chavez, February 26, 1945; Mrs. John C. Koster to U.S. Sen. Carl Hatch, March 7, 1945; Kenneth L. Dixon, "Ban on Rock of Ages Ceremony Still Brings Protests," *El Paso Times*, June 1, 1946, National Archives, Record Group 79, Carlsbad Caverns, Series 7, 201.

[19] Natt N. Dodge, Memorandum for the Regional Director, Region Three, August 21, 1944, NA, RG 79, Series 7, Carlsbad Caverns.

Boles played a visible role in the opposition to ending the Rock of Ages ceremony. He had spent more than fifteen years cultivating the southwestern public and when he asked for a favor — a letter, a newspaper editorial, or even a telephone call — few who remembered his generosity with his time and availability for their functions said no. In this, Boles worked against agency policy — subtly and behind the scenes, but not so discretely that the Washington, D.C., office did not recognize Boles' hand behind at least some of the opposition. Boles' network centered around civic organizations such as chambers of commerce, Kiwanis clubs, and newspapers. These sources provided an inordinate amount of the opposition, with the Carlsbad Chamber of Commerce in the lead. E. T. Scoyen, an associate regional director in the Santa Fe office of the Park Service, brought one such example to the attention of agency leaders. Early in 1946, the Santa Fe Kiwanis Club, where Scoyen served as treasurer and Natt Dodge was secretary, received a request from the Carlsbad chapter asking for a resolution in favor of reviving the ceremony. "We shall do everything in our power to keep them taking any action in the matter," Scoyen wrote Drury. Scoyen and Dodge succeeded, but Boles' allegiance to the agency became suspect.[20]

Changes in NPS policy and procedures offered another reason to curtail Boles' activities. The post-war Park Service quickly developed a pattern of transferring most superintendents every three years, in no small part to counteract the enormous proprietary interest in individual parks that longtime officials developed. The longtime superintendent of Southwestern National Monuments, Frank Pinkley, had been the first and most grandiose example; he regarded all the southwestern national monuments as his parks. Other long-serving superintendents became similarly attached to individual parks, as did Boles, sometimes substituting personal or regional standards for agency policy. Frequent transfers promoted professionalism, and few cases begged for it more than Boles. After nearly twenty years at Carlsbad Caverns, Boles and the park were closely identified, too closely so, some said. Persistent rumors that Boles could not resist intermittently offering the Rock of Ages ceremony did not help relations with his superiors. His efforts to foster regional outrage such as Scoyen detected sealed Boles' fate. On June 8, 1946, Boles was transferred to the superintendency of Hot Springs National Park in Hot Springs,

[20] E. T. Scoyen, Confidential Memo to the Director, March 7, 1946; E. T. Scoyen, Confidential Memo to the Director, March 12, 1946; Victor Minter to Secretary of the Interior, June 25, 1945, NA, RG 79, Series 7, Carlsbad Caverns National Park.

Arkansas, where Boles had close ties. In an unusual switch, Hot Springs Superintendent Donald Libbey replaced Boles. The change in leadership went even further, removing others who were tied to Boles' regime. Longtime Carlsbad Caverns Assistant Superintendent Jack Diehl was promoted to the regional office in Santa Fe as a planner, while William E. Branch, who had been superintendent at Petrified Forest National Park, stepped into the assistant superintendent's position. "Thank you, Colonel Boles for a job well done," an editorial in the Carlsbad *Daily Current-Argus* closed, pointing out Boles' affinity for making friends for himself and promoting the park at the same time. Boles' departure deprived supporters of the Rock of Ages ceremony of their enthusiasm. Although public complaints continued for some time, they ceased to be from community leaders across the Southwest and came almost exclusively from repeat visitors who remembered the ceremony from an earlier trip. Written complaints became a rarity. The superintendent's report noted the first "in many a month" in September 1947.[21] Without Boles to organize opposition, the change became permanent as memory of the ceremony diminished.

The struggle over the Rock of Ages ceremony typified the nature of turmoil between the park and its neighbors in the post-war era. During this time, the Park Service professionalized at an accelerating pace. In the new agency, a consummate showman such as Tom Boles became an anachronism. The Park Service developed a new, often science- and education-driven set of priorities, especially after the early 1950s, when those trained under the auspices of the GI Bill sought employment in the agency and brought new intellectual skills with them. This move toward science was best exemplified in documents such as the Leopold report of 1963, which clearly showed the influence of professional scientists — albeit an attitude tinged with a healthy romanticism.[22] In a value system that preferred education in a neoclassical sense to the entertainment of the firefall at Yosemite or Carlsbad's Rock of Ages Ceremony, struggles between the agency and the local — and sometimes regional — public were sure to ensue.

MISSION 66, the enormous decade-long capital development program begun in 1956 to revamp the national parks in time for the fiftieth anniversary of the Park Service's founding, also played a significant role in eliminating idiosyncracies that made Carlsbad Caverns National Park out of the ordinary within the park system. Many of the differences between Carlsbad and other parks stemmed from the incredible need for resources to administer the caverns. The

[21] "Carlsbad's Loss," Carlsbad *Daily Current-Argus*, April 28, 1946; Superintendent's Monthly Report, May 1946, Carlsbad Caverns National Park Library; Superintendent's Monthly Report, September 1947, Carlsbad Caverns National Park Library.

[22] Richard A. Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 205-12.

combination of specialized activity such as caving, the need for an innumerable number of guides and rangers, and the large physical plant required to run the park led to expedient procedures when resources were scarce. Under MISSION 66 the Park Service usually received what it asked for, and the excuses for idiosyncratic practices disappeared not only at Carlsbad Caverns, but throughout the park system. Even the most remote parks received full-fledged physical plants, temporarily reducing management problems to questions of personnel.[23]

Carlsbad Caverns reached a pinnacle of importance in the post-war era as it became an example of the bounty of being American. The park enjoyed enhanced symbolic meaning among a large segment of the American public. To those who found themselves with the funds and the leisure time to travel, the caverns were one of the places they selected to visit. With the time provided by the annual two-week vacation that had become codified in custom in the post-war era, larger numbers of visitors flocked to this wonder of the world. In it they saw a wonder worthy of the mid-twentieth century, a place that could both divorce them from the technological urban present of the 1950s and remind them of the successes that made it possible for them to travel. For the expanding middle class, awash with opportunity, Carlsbad Caverns was both familiar and different, something remarkable and tame at the same time. It awed successive generations in a upward spiral of visitation that began while Boles was in his last days at the park and continued through the Bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence in 1976.

The message it provided was a new kind of social affirmation, much different from the culturally highbrow railroad travel of the turn of the twentieth century. After Boles, Carlsbad Caverns offered a decidedly"middlebrow" experience; it appealed to the best instincts of a wide swath of the American public, drawn to urban areas and made more affluent by World War II and the decade that followed. The experience did not smack of hucksterism, especially after Boles. There was nothing of turn-of-the-century Coney Island left at the park. Its tourism was democratic. The entire middle-class could easily participate in it and it offered important insights into the nature of American life.[24] Mid-century Americans had to see Carlsbad Caverns. It remained a wonder and a curiosity, but the park had also become an indicator of belonging to a forward-looking, self-referential nation that took enormous pride in its accomplishments.

[23] Foresta, *America's National Parks and Their Keepers*, 80-94.

[24] John Jakle, *The Tourist in Twentieth-Century America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 185-99; Eric Goldman, *The Crucial Decade and After*: *America 1945-1960* (NY: Random House, 1961), 1-22; John Kasson, *Amusing the Millions: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (NY: Hill and Wang, 1978), 31-47.

These factors combined to make Carlsbad Caverns National Park increasingly important in the decades following World War II. The park stood for the things Americans valued, represented their ability to travel, and became a source of national pride. In this configuration, Carlsbad Caverns became a central piece of the puzzle of identity for post-war Americans. It was one of the many symbols that told them who they were and what was important about bearing the standard of the Free World.

The rise of Carlsbad Caverns National Park revealed a classic pattern in the American West. As tourism grew in importance, a service industry subject to its own rhythms began to compete with conventional extractive industries, not only for economic preeminence, but also for the region's heart and soul. This regional economy, dependent on agriculture, ranching, and potash mining, added another pillar, tourism. However, tourist work was different. To the people of southeastern New Mexico, service work seemed ephemeral and less important than other jobs, even demeaning. No one "produced" anything; no steaks, no potash, no grapes, no airplane wings. For many, tied to the framework of a production-oriented economy, reconciling this new form of economic activity with the concept of "real" — that is productive — work proved difficult. As it had to many who engaged in it elsewhere in the West, tourist service seemed somehow secondary, not fully worthy of the efforts of the region's proud and independent people. The increasing reliance on service created a quandary, one that many western regions shared.

Tourism was normally a sink, a place to which production economies descended. But not here. Despite southeastern New Mexico's history of successive Anglo-American economic regimes — beginning with agriculture and ranching, proceeding to guano, oil and gas in the larger region, potash, and military work — the turn to tourism came as a result of external factors instead of internal collapse that typified its embrace elsewhere in the West. Unlike other places, which sought to manufacture a reason for visitors to come, at Carlsbad Caverns, the caves provided infinite reasons within the cultural boundaries of mid-century America. In this sense, tourism moved alongside existing economic endeavor in the trans-Pecos instead of replacing other ways of making a living. This both smoothed the transition and made it more difficult for people to grasp the significance of the service economy.

The development of regional infrastructure and the consistent increase in visitation promoted economic development. Carlsbad Caverns experienced great increases in visitation immediately after the end of the war, as did most parks. Throughout 1946 and 1947, superintendents Boles and Libbey reported continuous visitation milestones: the largest annual

total, the largest visitation in a single day, the greatest monthly visitation total.[25] To meet the ever-growing demand, the park needed improved facilities, the town of Carlsbad more motel rooms and restaurants, and the region better roads. The claim on resources to support such development came from two sources: tourism and the oil and gas industry. Only these possessed sufficient importance to attract outside investment, either federal or private.

Transportation technologies also played a significant role in further linking southeastern New Mexico and the trans-Pecos with the rest of the nation. The network of national highways such as Route 66 and U.S. Highway 30 barely sufficed during the 1930s and World War II. The streams of postwar travelers proved a need for greater highway capacity. The threat of the Cold War contributed greatly to the sense that highways had become even more important to national defense. As trucks replaced trains as the primary delivery system of goods, Americans became the best example of author Daniel Yeargin's "hydrocarbon man" — people dependent on oil, the remarkably cheap and seemingly infinite fossil fuel. In 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the Highway Act of 1956, which authorized the construction of 41,000 miles of interstate highways, initially four-lane roads that eventually spanned the continent and made cross-country vehicular travel a staple of American mythology.[26] In the nineteenth century the railroads began the process of connecting southeastern New Mexico and the trans-Pecos to the rest of the country; hydrocarbon society completed its physical dimensions, finalizing the emergence of a broader, middle-class audience at Carlsbad Caverns and other places that could be reached by road.

For Carlsbad Caverns National Park, the new highways that linked the nation began as a promise and ended as a curse. As long as Carlsbad Caverns remained a destination — a place to which people came instead of stopping and passing through — its remote location did not constitute a liability. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, people planned their vacations around a

[25] Superintendent's Monthly Report, May 1946, Carlsbad Caverns National Park Library; Superintendent's Monthly Report, June 1946, Carlsbad Caverns National Park Library; Superintendent's Monthly Report, August 1947, Carlsbad Caverns National Park Library; Superintendent's Monthly Report, September 1947, Carlsbad Caverns National Park Library.

[26] John Rae, *The Road and the Car* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971, 37; Yeargin, *The Prize*, 541-60; David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (NY: Fawcett Books, 1994), 156-188.

trip to the caverns. They came from both coasts and the Midwest, over a pastiche of roads, two-lane and four-lane, to reach their destination. A steady march arrived in Carlsbad or White's City, sought accommodations, and took a tour through the caves as an integral part of being American. As the interstate highways reached completion, the patterns of American travel rapidly changed. The interstate became the primary mode of cross-country travel, eclipsing two-lane roads and small towns so completely that a best-selling nonfiction work in the early 1980s, William Least-Heat Moon's *Blue Highways*, was named after the anachronistic two-lane roads drawn in blue on most maps.[27] In addition to this physical change, new generations — first the children of the 1960s who threw out the existing symbols of American society, and their even more callous successors, the so-called Generation X, raised on MTV — created their own symbols. Carlsbad Caverns lost ground in the constellation of American wonders.

The transformation of travel patterns played a particularly significant role in the Southwest. Regional patterns of travel followed Route 66, "the highway that's my way that's the best," as crooner Bobby Troup immortalized it, as it wound from St. Louis to the Pacific Coast. Construction of the national highway began in 1926. As the road reached further into the West, it came to fill a function similar to that of the railroad. Like the railroad, the highway created a culture; the expectations of people within its influence were different than those beyond. After Route 66 reached Santa Monica Pier in 1938, it became a corridor on which travelers focused, fostering a culture tied to the people and goods that came along the road that was largely independent of the world that surrounded it.[28]

Travel conditions were also different, although not to the degree that subsequent interstate highways created. Along Route 66, amenities — by the standards of the day — abounded, including gasoline stations, restaurants, motor courts, and other respites for travelers. Beyond it, travelers took their chances. Even the cross-country highways were two lanes at best; Route 66 acquired the moniker "Bloody 66" as a result of the enormous casualty rate along it.[29] The difference between the two lanes of a major highway and those of smaller highways — as long as the latter was paved — was measured in the volume of traffic. As long as that similarity persisted, leaving Route 66 to see Carlsbad Caverns did not constitute a psychic hardship, a diversion from a goal.

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[27] William Least-Heat Moon, *Blue Highways: A Journey into America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982).

[28] Marguerite S. Shaffer, "See America First: Tourism and National Identity" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1994), 1-26; Michael Wallis, *Route 66: The Mother Road* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1990); Quinta Scott and Susan Croce Kelly, *Route 66: The Highway and its People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988).

[29] Scott and Kelly, *Route 66: The Highway and its People*.

The nature of motor travel remained idiosyncratic well after World War II, enhancing the sense of adventure that every automobile traveler experienced. As travelers proceeded further west, they found more appealing regionalisms, all of which enhanced the sense of the act of traveling as part of the adventure. Food offerings changed from barbecue to chili con carne and tamales. Visitors were attracted to the motor courts of places such as Albuquerque — with such names as the Coronado, the Pueblo Bonita Court, and the Eldorado. With such enticing concepts at hand, a trip to the caverns evoked the same imagery as did the main highways and people traveling Route 66 did not seem to mind the distance out of the way that Carlsbad Caverns required. In 1960, when the popular television show *Route 66* featured an episode at Carlsbad Caverns, the point was made. In the story, George Maharis and Martin Milner, the show's two stars, took jobs at White's City to replenish their depleted finances and find themselves trying to coax out a group who fear nuclear attack and have taken refuge in the caves. Despite being more than 200 miles from the actual Route 66, the show illustrated the cultural centrality of Carlsbad Caverns. Continual promotion of El Paso by its Chamber of Commerce created a road loop that travelers could take. These two- or three-day side trips had considerable appeal in a culture accustomed to the concept of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad's Indian detours, day- and overnight side tours departing from railroad depots and Fred Harvey hotels.[30]

The transformation of Route 66 into Interstate 40 following 1960 inaugurated new and far more complicated automobile travel patterns. The four-lane divided interstates' physical construction and speed of travel separated people from the landscapes through which they traveled. These highways bypassed existing towns and other attractions; as did train passengers of a century before, interstate drivers passed through the landscape, selectively engaging it and enjoying far greater control over their experience than did drivers on two-lane highways. Interstate travelers could drive hundreds of miles without stopping for a red light; they could eat at the chains of now-familiar restaurants perched along the highway's controlled exits and entrances. The interstates made auto travel into a national experience rather than a local and regional one. The carcasses of towns the interstates passed by dotted the nation.

For Carlsbad Caverns National Park, the construction of interstate highways began a long and elaborate chipping away at the place of the park in national consciousness. As the premium on haste replaced the languid leisurely vacations of earlier in the century and as the interstates centralized the flow of cross-country traffic, progressively fewer travelers ventured beyond the corridors created by these highways. With speed limits as high as seventy miles per hour and traffic moving even more quickly by the early 1970s, the interstate highways provided a raceway across the country. While places such as the Grand Canyon — a little more than one hour from the interstate — retained and even enhanced their audience, places farther away suffered. For Carlsbad Caverns, almost three hours from Interstate 40 to the north and two-and-one-half hours from Interstate 10 at El Paso, the changes in travel patterns presented a genuine challenge.

[30] "Carlsbad Caverns to be Used in National Television Show," *El Paso Times,* November 10, 1960; Jakle, *The Tourist,* 226-27.

Another challenge to visitation cropped up in the changing nature of American entertainment and the expectations of the young. For generations, rural and small-town Americans had experienced entertainment that came to them. It took many forms: traveling fairs and baseball teams, movies, the circus, and other features produced a culture that craved something, in some cases anything, out of the ordinary as a diversion from humdrum daily life. When Ringling Brothers coined the phrase "The Greatest Show on Earth" to describe its traveling circus, most people in small-town America easily accepted the characterization. After World War II, television appeared, altering the formulas for success on which traveling entertainment depended. Americans could stay home, and without paying, experience a previously unimagined range of entertainment. Dramatic changes resulted. Americans became more critical of the entertainment they saw in person, expecting more and becoming far less easily impressed. Television also portended an increasingly homogeneous America — in language, in fashion, and in what its viewers regarded as worthy. These different factors combined to push Carlsbad Caverns gently to the margins of the mainstream.

The transformation was ironic. The same sorts of technological innovations that made Carlsbad Caverns more accessible drew the attention of younger Americans away from the caverns. By the 1970s, when movies boasted a range of incredible adventures from *Planet of the Apes* to *2001: A Space Odyssey* and television shows such as *Lost in Space* offered a vision of the future that could — and should — exist for Americans, the magic of Carlsbad Caverns seemed lost on an increasingly sedentary, urban public that mainly traveled by interstate highways. A walk through the caverns seemed dated; television and movies routinely showed more spectacular scenes. To a culture that increasingly had difficulty differentiating between the "real" and the contrived, the experience of being underground among even the most spectacular natural formations had considerably less cachet and somehow seemed less impressive than it had a generation before.

Another irony existed. During the two decades following World War II, southeastern New Mexico experienced consistent growth. New motels in the town of Carlsbad helped handle the growing visitation during the first thirty years after the war, and some people settled there as a result of their visits. Retirees in search of the ubiquitous Sunbelt, where life was inexpensive and the weather mostly stayed warm, also flocked to the region, soon providing another pillar for the regional economy. As the town's primary feature, Carlsbad Caverns National Park began to struggle for its place at the center of the American mainstream, the service economy that the park represented played an increasingly significant role in southeastern New Mexico and the trans-Pecos.

This shift appeared slowly and as if behind a mask. Park visitation continued to rise, and in 1960, the *Carlsbad Current-Argus* could crow that more than 9.5 million visitors had passed through the caverns since it became a national park in 1930. Other factors contributed to the growth of a service economy in the region. New Mexico State University opened its first branch campus in Carlsbad in 1950 as the town's population consistently grew. Following a typical pattern in the post-World War II West, Carlsbad grew from 7,116 people in 1940 to 17,975 in 1950 and 25,541 in 1960. An airplane factory in Carlsbad produced its first plane in 1960, the result of a local $7 million bond issue, but this

manufacturing endeavor remained more the exception than the rule.[31] The nods toward traditional forms of economic activity — plants, manufacturing and similar light industry — effectively prevented the local community from recognizing its growing dependence on service endeavors such as the park.

Water availability buttressed traditional economic activities in the region, and improvements in the delivery system furthered the federal presence. A 1967 Bureau of Reclamation report advocated the construction of a new dam to inundate McMillan Dam and Reservoir and replace it with a larger lake. Located between McMillan and Avalon dams, the new structure would eliminate the hazards that plagued the Carlsbad project since the turn of the century. The Carlsbad irrigation district assumed responsibility for the costs associated with providing additional irrigation water, while the federal government took on the flood control and dam safety expenses, the vast share of the project's cost. The project was authorized in 1972; construction began in 1984, and the dam completed in 1987.[32] With the solution to the region's long-standing water problems under construction, few questioned the viability of traditional endeavor until economic changes forced the entire region to scramble for new strategies.

The decline of the potash industry was a severe blow to the region's aspirations. In November 1967, U.S. Borax and Chemical Company closed its refinery near Loving, sending the regional economy into a tailspin. At the height of post-war prosperity — before the combination of the Vietnam War, which drained the federal treasury and national enthusiasm, and the OPEC oil embargo, which dramatically raised energy prices, sent inflation spiraling and created a condition called "stagflation" — Carlsbad endured a mini-depression that shook the community and the region. Guano mining had already declined precipitously since even the doldrums of the 1930s. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Park Service obtained a number of the remaining holdings from disinterested owners. As guano fell from prominence, potash rose; during the 1955-1956 fiscal years, the industry, centered in Carlsbad, produced nearly 15.5 million tons of the mineral valued at almost $61 million. In 1962, the one-millionth railroad car filled with potash left Carlsbad. At its peak, potash employed four thousand people in southeastern New Mexico. The 1967 closure portended a difficult future. The impact was so rapid and dramatic that the 1970 census showed a decrease in the population of Carlsbad to 21,297 people, a fall of more than 4,000 from the 1960 numbers.[33] Although traditional economic endeavor continued to play a significant role, after 1967 the region sought to attract other forms of economic activity.

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[31] "Carlsbad Population Up 8,000 in 8 Years," *El Paso Herald*, May 24, 1958; "New Factory in Carlsbad Turns Out First Airplane," *El Paso Herald*, December 19, 1960; "Cavems Celebrate Birthday," *El Paso Times*, May 15, 1961.

[32] Hufstetler and Johnson, *Watering the Land*, 148-49; New Mexico First, "Water: Lifeblood of New Mexico," (Albuquerque: New Mexico Town Halls, 1988), 38-43; Curtis C. Wayne, "Brantley Dam 'is Born' Tuesday," *Carlsbad Current-Argus*, August 31, 1988.

[33] U.S. Census, 1970; "Carlsbad Area Produces 12 Millions Tons of Potash," *Carlsbad Current-Argus*, October 20, 1957; "No. 2 Million 'Scheduled' Now in Carlsbad: Potash Mines Hit New High," *El Paso Times*, April 22, 1962; Jed Howard, "A Carlsbad Chronology," July 2, 1987, Carlsbad Public Library.

In this new formulation of economic activity, Carlsbad Caverns National Park played a crucial role. In the late 1960s and 1970s, it retained a powerful capability to draw visitors to it — before and during the cultural revolution that changed American tastes — and some of those visitors became new town residents. As the community focused on tourism as a source of employment and retirees as a constituency for locals to serve, a new Carlsbad took shape — one dominated by motels and medical facilities. Among Sun Belt communities, Carlsbad began to experience the transformations of the 1980s more than a decade in advance of the election of Ronald Reagan.

The park took the lead in changing the culture of the region to service-oriented activities, as occurred in many parts of the country that experienced similar change. The Park Service had long been an innovator in service activities; its programs set the national standard for American travelers before the fragmenting of national culture that began during the late 1960s. At Carlsbad Caverns, interpretation and visitor services had been in place for more than thirty years. The park weathered the Rock of Ages controversy and by 1960 offered a formalized, educational program designed to provide visitors with an experience that was both awe-inspiring and intellectually significant. Visitor amenities met the typically stringent rules and regulations of the agency, providing quality service. Carlsbad Caverns became the bellwether in the region, the service to which other offerings were compared — and typically found wanting.

By the 1960s, Carlsbad Caverns could boast a comprehensive trail system paved to accommodate the demands of post-war visitors. From the earliest trails laid by Jim White and the first Park Service construction efforts such as the entrance stairway built in 1925 — typically dirt walkways and wooden stairways — the Park Service gradually but consistently upgraded the cavern's trails. The Park Service handled most of the work. PWA and CCC workers and others performed occasional tasks, but the largest share fell to agency employees. By 1929, the Park Service used professional staff to engineer its trail development. Accurate surveys and grades lessened the slope and the difficulty of descent. In 1930, a tunnel at the entrance that permitted a more gradual descent replaced the entrance stairway. The remainder of the 1930s was largely devoted to smaller projects. After World War II, the modern trail system began to take shape. Efforts to remove the remaining wooden stairways and lessen the grades continued, and between 1951 and 1953, paving of the pathways followed. In 1954 and 1955, the elevators were installed, and cavern seating areas were constructed. In 1963, a 1,000-person rock amphitheater for summer bat flight spectators was completed at the natural entrance. By then, visitors could feel that the caverns were accommodating in a way they had not previously been.[34]

[34] Donald R. Standiford, "The Development of the Cavern Trail System and Other Visitor Facilities in Carlsbad Caverns," unpublished manuscript, Carlsbad Caverns National Park Library.

The cavern lunchroom, 750 feet below the surface, provided an example of the agency's ability to work with licensed concessionaires. Jim White established a lunch stop on his early tours, but before the establishment of the monument people ate wherever they chose. They carried lunches with them, often packed by Carlsbad restaurants. The water they drank dripped into wooden casks White placed in judicious locations, and cave pools often provided additional drinking water. By 1928, thirsty visitors nearly drained Devil's Spring, and the Park Service piped water there to accommodate the growing number of visitors. The Park Service began to pipe in water and installed a drinking fountain to relieve the pressure on cavern resources. In 1927, the Cavern Supply Company was organized and the following year it began to offer the famed box lunches familiar to two generations of travelers in the original lunchroom at the north end of the caverns, . In 1929, the lunchroom was relocated to its present location, next to the elevator shaft and directly below the visitor center. On February 9, 1937, Jim White, who resigned from the Park Service in 1929, opened a booth in the new lunchroom for selling postcards and his memoirs, and he remained as long as his health allowed.[35] In this setting the Park Service was able to assess closely the services that visitors received and monitor the costs. Despite occasional disagreements it was an ideal arrangement, one in which the Park Service and the concessionaires had mutual goals and could agree upon the most satisfactory course of action.

National Park Service firmly held control inside the park, but it extended not an inch beyond its boundaries, where White's City sat. Like many early tourism entrepreneurs, Charlie White was a character who did anything he could to attract visitors and entice them to stay. More than thirty billboards dotted the roads to White's City, each announcing a different attraction. White opened the "Million Dollar Museum," full of hundreds of butter molds, typewriters, bear traps, roller skates, buttons, shoes, postcards, and other implements of daily life. The rattles of almost one-hundred rattlesnakes stood alongside animal horns and heads, doll houses, and other curiosities. A two-headed rattlesnake and a two-headed turtle once graced the museum, and the head of the twelfth-largest moose ever shot in Wyoming remains. Kiss-o-meters, an arcade device that used an individual's handshake to rate their puckering style and ability, offered a diversion.[36] Road travelers might not be awed by White's City, but they were likely to be amused.

White's City posed problems for the Park Service. Like Ralph Henry Cameron's hotel and camp and the Kolb Brothers' studio at the Grand Canyon, it was outside of agency reach, but White's City played an important role in shaping how people regarded the caverns. The fact that

[35] Standiford, "The Development of the Cavern Trail System and Other Visitor Facilities in Carlsbad Caverns," 8-12.

[36] Bryant, "Cashing in on the Caves," 54-56; Ripp, "Greetings From White's City," 71.

White shared the same last name as the unrelated Jim White, who served as Chief Guide at the caverns until June 26, 1929, also hindered the Park Service's efforts to create a respectable image for Carlsbad Caverns National Park. The collection of kitsch outside the park somehow intimated that what was inside it was not sacred. The lunchroom on the cavern floor, while convenient, also accentuated the sense of the caves as profane space, part and parcel of the modern world.

The relationship between White's City and Carlsbad Caverns illustrated an always problematic situation for the Park Service after automobiles became a primary means of conveyance for park visitors: how to assure the quality of experience when the Park Service did not control the people and facilities that offered service. At the Grand Canyon, control had been accomplished by moving the train depot closer to the "appropriate" facilities, but that was when rail passengers comprised the overwhelming majority of visitors. With automobiles and roads, parks such as the Grand Canyon experienced the same situation as did Carlsbad Caverns. With myriad ways to approach the park and many choices among places to stop on the way, visitors became subject to influences that combined to undermine the impact of the park's message.

As it did in countless other situations, the Park Service used its vast resources to bring outside operators within its fold gradually. Agency officials worked with Charlie White to achieve mutually beneficial agreements that both furthered White's goals and upheld Park Service standards. In the process, the Park Service way became the measure of service endeavor in the Carlsbad area. In 1961, when the ten-millionth visitor entered the caverns, Park Service officials could point to their activities as a major linchpin of the region. The work of the agency anticipated change, as service endeavor became an increasingly larger part of the regional economy. The loud protests in 1968, when the Department of the Interior announced plans to close the caverns two days a week in an economy measure on the heels of the decline in the potash industry, illustrated how important tourism had become.[37]

The connection to the bigger cave in Lechuguilla Cave made Memorial Day weekend 1986 further highlighted the shift. The cave had been discovered in 1914 and was known in the fashion of most caves for the better part of the century, but in the 1980s, the connection to the larger portion made it something new, an unexplored cave that spoke to the cultural needs of a culture that placed a premium on fresh experience. Lechuguilla was mined for guano by John Ogle, Cad Ogle, and C. Whitfield, who claimed it in 1914, but it had fallen from scrutiny.

[37] "Two-Day Caverns Closing Ordered," *Carlsbad Current-Argus*, November 22, 1968; "Caverns Closed at Carlsbad Two Days a Week," *El Paso Times*, November 23, 1968; "Caverns to be Open Seven Days a Week," *El Paso Times*, December 21, 1968; "Cargo Reports Carlsbad to Open for Seven Days," *El Paso Times*, February 27, 1969; *The Capitan Reef* 4 (Spring 1996):12.

Occasional forays into the cave occurred, but few people took any notice; one group labeled the cave "Misery Hole" after a 1950s trip. The cave drew little attention until 1974, when cave researcher David Jagnow reported the possibility of a larger room beneath the known bottom of the cave. During the late 1970s, a number of Park Service and Cave Research Foundation expeditions explored the cave, bringing it to the attention of cavers and the public.[38] In this sense, Lechuguilla Cave was discovered — reclaimed really from obscurity — and made into a symbol of authentic experience.

Lechuguilla Cave became a reflection of the culture of wilderness. This phenomenon grew in popularity and size in the aftermath of the technological revolution that made serious outdoor activity more accessible to people, and it became a marker of individuality and status in an age of mass consumption. Lechuguilla Cave came to stand for beauty and mystery, for the awe the paved main cavern no longer inspired in everyone. Noted outdoor writer Tim Cahill made clear that distinction: "I am in the heart of the newest wonder of the world," he wrote in *National Geographic*. "Like the Grand Canyon, Lechuguilla is overwhelming. Experienced cavers (the only kind that can deal with Lechuguilla's demands) are immediately dazzled." When Cahill likened his experience to that of Lewis and Clark, NPS cave specialist Ron Kerbo, who became the park's second cave specialist in 1976, responded: "you know, I used to use that analogy myself. But then I realized that everywhere Lewis and Clark went, there were people. Exploring Lechuguilla is entirely different. No one's ever been in those virgin passages. It's Neil Armstrong stuff."[39]

The contrast between the perception of Lechuguilla and New Cave, "discovered" in Slaughter Canyon in the 1930s, showed the range of distance from the mainstream a park like Carlsbad Caverns could contain. After a goat herder named Tom Tucker stumbled across New Cave, the Ogle Mining Company claimed it and after a few studies, in 1943 began to mine its guano. The operation generated few positive results at a time when the demand for guano was low, and mining continued intermittently until the late 1950s. By the late 1940s, the cave had become an attraction; the feature film *King Solomon's Mines* was filmed there in 1950. In 1954, miners found the bones of a previously unrecorded species of a bat that carbon dating indicated was more than 17,800 years old. In 1957, the cave yielded camel bones, and deer and bison

[38] n.a., "Capsule History of Lechuguilla Cave," ca. 1989, Carlsbad Caverns National Park Library; Tim Cahill, "The Splendors of Lechuguilla Cave," *National Geographic* 179 3 (March 1991): 34-58.

[39] Cahill, The Splendors of Lechuguilla Cave," 56-58.

bones, along with stone blades and pottery fragments were all found. Yet New Cave never set off a rush to explore comparable to Lechuguilla, nor did it seem to represent a new experience for the public. The Park Service preserved New Cave as an primitive underground experience, calling it the "Slaughter Canyon Cave" and providing an activity that resembled spelunking for a wider swath of the public that could generally engage in the sport.[40] Lechuguilla Cave represented authentic experience; the older, less spectacular New Cave only simulated it.

The interest in Lechuguilla Cave spoke to real American needs. By the 1980s, young Americans especially craved experience that others could not imitate. Spelunking met the criteria. Although it had always been a specialized experience, it possessed all the features that people who sought to prove themselves sought; it was, as Kerbo noted, "Neil Armstrong stuff" — unrepeatable, impossible to package, and too difficult for most. In a culture sold on the cult of experience that had already packaged Mount Everest to the unprepared for the sum of $65,000 per head, Lechuguilla Cave had tremendous appeal.[41] It remained authentic, "real," not susceptible to the corruption of the mainstream.

In this, Lechuguilla Cave remained a specialized activity, apart from the developing norms of personal expression in American society — what can be called the "Xtreme Games" syndrome — but equally a part of the culture of tourism, tied to the very roots of the Carlsbad Caverns experience. To an observer, the descriptions of Lechuguilla Cave mirrored those of the discovery and popularization of Carlsbad Caverns in the 1920s and 1930s. Here was a spectacular wonder, a place far from the ordinary that reflected Americans' desires. Here was a place to which people could aspire, intellectually if not physically, that suggested that there were mysteries still to be uncovered and explored even in a time when humans walked on the moon and technology allowed both the processing of billions of bytes of information per second and pictures of the inside of the living human body. Humanity could know and maybe even understand, Lechuguilla Cave seemed to say, but it could not conquer all.

Lechuguilla Cave was also an important part of the continuing economic reliance on tourism in the region. As an attraction, the existence of the cave again elevated Carlsbad Caverns, providing a new attraction that drew people to previous ones as well. With articles in *National Geographic* magazine, and a parade of spelunkers who sought to explore this exciting new find, Lechuguilla Cave offered much to the region. The increasing prominence of tourism after 1970, especially in the aftermath of the demise of the potash industry, made Lechuguilla Cave an important component in the transition from regional production economies to their service successors.[42]

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[40] n. a., "History of New Cave," n.d., Carlsbad Caverns National Park Library; Renee Rubin, "Bat Guano Mining Near Carlsbad: A Former Miner Remembers an Unusual Venture,"
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[41] Jon Krakauer, *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster* (NY: Villard, 1997).

[42] U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, "Final: Dark Canyon Environmental Impact Statement," (Roswell: Bureau of Land Management, 1993), 1-1-3-46.

To observers of the regional scene, the transition to service economies and tourism made sense. Since Anglo settlement in the nineteenth century, the region had relied on one panacea after another. Ranching, irrigated agriculture, guano, oil and gas, and potash all promised prosperity and success, all provided it and the hope for the future that came with dreams — at least temporarily. The shift to service activities such as tourism followed the same pattern. Carlsbad became interested in "retirees and rest homes," local observer and historian Jed Howard noted, succinctly defining the parameters of the changing economy, and the numbers bore him out. Although visitation at Carlsbad Caverns National Park continued a fluctuation of about 100,000 visitors annually, ranging from 672, 960 in 1980 to 781,963 in 1982 and a peak of 792,398 in 1989 before falling to 679,450 in 1991, in 1990 tourism employed more Eddy County workers than did mineral extraction. As was typical, all forms of tourist endeavor paid employees far less than did the shrinking manufacturing and mining sectors.[43] To many, tourism and service indeed appeared to be a sink to which the regional productive economy had descended.

This new business field also provided a look at a different future, one being simultaneously pioneered in similar communities. The shift to service meant dispatching with older ideas and the ways of living that attended them. It often meant giving up the creation of a tangible product for something intangible, the production of valuable minerals for a visitor's thankful word as proof of accomplishment. For many, schooled in this older American from of endeavor, the transition was hard. For younger people, especially as the 1980s began, this new form was all they knew.

The new pillar in this setting was the same one that had underpinned the region since early in the twentieth century: the federal government. In 1973, the Department of Energy (DOE) came to Carlsbad looking for a radioactive waste disposal site, filling the enormous gap left in the community by the decline of potash. Since the days of irrigated agriculture, most regional economic activities had some sort of federal underpinning; although only the park and the adjoining Lincoln National Forest seemed overtly federal. The energy agency's presence of the 1970s pointed to a more complicated future. Cynics could charge that the DOE looked for communities in distress as locations for its activities, but in troubled economic times it remained a welcome addition anywhere in the West. In the Carlsbad area, the arrival of DOE had the additional effect of fusing the region's past and charting the nation's future.

This new and visible federal presence had at least one significant drawback: its payroll came closely attached to the issue of hazardous waste disposal. After 1945, the use of products that generated hazardous waste escalated with remarkable speed, generating widespread concern about pollution in American society. By the 1960s, a backlash against the downside of industrialization began in earnest. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, which chronicled the impact of a widely used pesticide, DDT, on birds and other species, awakened the public, and the modern environmental movement took

[43] Jed Howard, "Carlsbad Chronology," July 2, 1987, Carlsbad Public Library, Carlsbad, New Mexico; New Mexico Department of Labor, "Non-Agricultural Employment, Wages, and weekly earnings, 1990," (Santa Fe: New Mexico Department of Labor, 1990); New Mexico Economic Development Department, 1991, "Eddy County Tourism, 1990," (Santa Fe: New Mexico Economic Development Department, 1991).

shape, replete with oppositional politics and a strong distrust for government pronouncements. At its urging and with the support of much of the public, government and industry began to address the problem of technological prosperity. In this mix, waste disposal and the management and containment of its impact became major issues.[44]

Much of the West remained in federal hands, subject to callous treatment by federal decision-makers. A range of nuclear, and chemical facilities, many tied to the military, abounded. Beginning during World War II, radioactive material in Los Alamos, New Mexico, and Hanford, Washington, became an important component of the national arsenal. After the war the widespread presence of military bases and installations as the nation moved toward nuclear power assured that dangerous materials were everywhere. Civilian atomic power applications increased, and the nation began to look for places to store low- and high-level waste from both civilian and military use permanently.[45]

New Mexico and Carlsbad had been part of the history of nuclear testing even before the efforts to site repositories began. On December 10, 1961, as part of the Eisenhower-era Atoms for Peace program and under the rubric of "Plowshares," the test detonation of an atomic device took place outside Carlsbad. This test was supposed to pave the way for the use of nuclear explosions for peaceful civilian purposes. Although the people of the region were initially less than enthusiastic about an underground nuclear explosion in their backyard, the local newspaper supported the project as an economic boon for the area. As did many such issues, nuclear testing split the growth coalition — those in the community who stood to benefit from economic development — from everyone else, especially those who felt comfortable and secure in their existing economic niches. Potash mine owners feared the blast would collapse their mines, farmers thought that nuclear fallout would damage their crops, and motel owners and NPS officials recognized that the explosion might deter tourists. Government studies addressed those concerns, promising that no fallout would occur. After a three-year hiatus in atomic testing ended in 1961, Carlsbad took the lead as the location of the first atomic test for peaceful purposes. The bomb was detonated 1,200 feet below ground in an ancient salt deposit at noon on December 10, 1961, the 3.1 kiloton blast creating a cavity 150 feet in diameter and 75 feet high.[46]

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[44] Hal K. Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation? Environmentalism in the United States Since 1945* (NY: Harcourt Brace, 1997), 170-196.

[45] n. a., "N. M. Atom Blast is set for Dec. 10," *El Paso Herald*, December 2, 1961; Frank Morgan, "Salt Deposit Aids Test of Bomb Near Carlsbad," *El Paso Herald*, December 6, 1961; Valerie Kuletz, ; Peter Hales, *Atomic Spaces*, ; Michele S. Gerber, *On the Homefront: The Cold War Legacy of the Hanford* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Pres, 1992); Hal K. Rothman, *On Rims and Ridges: The Los Alamos Area Since 1880* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

[46] "Expert Says Plan Gnome Won't Hurt, Mine, Oil Area," *Carlsbad Current-Argus*, September 11, 1958; Bill Becker, "Gnome A-Blast All Set," *El Paso Times*, December 10, 1961; US AEC, "Project Gnome: Part of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission's Plowshare Program for Peaceful Uses," (Albuquerque: US AEC, 1961), 1-9; n. a., *Projects Gnome and Sedan: The Plowshare Program* (Washington, D.C.: Nuclear defense Agency, 1973), 1-33; Frank Keith and Catherine B. Wren, *The Nuclear Impact: A Case Study of the Plowshare Program to Provide Gas by Underground Nuclear Stimulation in the Rocky Mountains* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1976); Richard G. Hewlett and Jack Holl, *Atoms for Peace and War, 1953-1961: Eisenhower and the Atomic Energy Commission* (Berkeley:

The blast created another image for Carlsbad, different from the place of underground wonders that the community had long promoted. After the blast, Carlsbad became part of the national wasteland, one of the places that could be sacrificed so that the rest of the country could be safe — first from the Soviet threat of the Cold War and later from the threat of contamination from its own toxic wastes. Carlsbad developed a love-hate relationship with federal dominance, as did southern Nevada, which endured more than 100 aboveground and countless below ground nuclear tests. Both tourist attraction and national sacrifice zone, the region around Carlsbad had been softened for further federal entreaties by the acceptance of Project Gnome.

In the later process of seeking locations for waste repositories, federal agencies and waste-producing contractors looked for specific characteristics. These typically included rural locations in need of an economic boost, and a prior federal presence. Both the national park and Project Gnome provided a context for further federal presence, and the 1961 blast and the 1975 siting of a $100 million uranium processing plant near Carlsbad indicated local familiarity and maybe even acceptance of the risks inherent in a waste repository.[47] In the search for a place to store nuclear waste, Carlsbad had many desirable traits. Only the characterization of a site as safe for hazardous waste storage held up the determination that the Carlsbad area was suited to house a nuclear waste repository.

Salt formations such as those near Carlsbad were desirable locations for storing nuclear waste. These salt beds tended to be found in geologically stable area generally freed of earthquakes, and as early as 1950 the National Academy of Sciences pronounced geologically stable formations such as deep salt beds as ideal locations for long-term storage of waste materials. Throughout the 1960s, scouting for locations went on, especially in places such as the Permian Uplift, which were known to have salt formations. Sandia National Laboratory in Albuquerque took a lead role in the search for a site in New Mexico, looking at southeastern New Mexico in the 1970s, as regional economic doldrums muted much possible opposition. On October 2, 1980, the U.S. Congress approved initial funding for a project called the Waste Isolation Pilot Program (WIPP), to be located twenty-six miles east of Carlsbad. The facility was designed to be an experiment that would determine whether low-level nuclear waste from the production of nuclear weapons could be safely stored in salt beds. This category of waste consisted of clothes, tools, rags, and items contaminated with small quantities of radioactive elements, typically plutonium.[48]

The search for a location for federal nuclear waste coincided with efforts to site repositories for civilian and military high-level nuclear waste, and toxic waste of various kinds and other hazardous byproducts of industrialization. By the mid-1970s, American attitudes toward nuclear power had

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University of California Press, 1989).

[47] Mike Stepanovich, "NM Will Get $100 Million Uranium Plant," *El Paso Times*, October 10, 1975.

[48] Sandia Laboratories, *Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, Eddy County, New Mexico* (Albuquerque: Sandia Laboratories, 1977), 1-4-1-10.

passed from suspicion to dread; the crisis at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania ended American confidence in the nuclear power industry. The public did not differentiate between waste storage and nuclear power production. With enormous quantities of waste scattered around the country, efforts to consolidate them in permanent and safe repositories began to take shape.[49]

Issues of siting quickly descended to questions of politics and privation. The federal high-level waste siting process focused on three locations, but in a move engineered by U.S. Sen. Bennett Johnston of Louisiana, in 1987 attention centered only on Yucca Mountain, Nevada. A pattern in siting became clear: poor, rural places were singled out as were urban communities with relatively low levels of education and community organization, especially if they were dominated by people who tended to passively accept authority.[50] This left large sections of the Southwest vulnerable — especially southeastern New Mexico and the trans-Pecos, where typically sparse population and economic need went hand in hand.

In both Texas and New Mexico, attempts to site hazardous or nuclear waste storage facilities focused on the remote and the poverty-stricken areas. In 1989, Texas planned to continue to build a low-level nuclear waste dump near Fort Hancock in Hudspeth County, about fifty miles east of El Paso, despite considerable evidence that the area could be subject to an earthquake that might destabilize the storage facility. The site also appeared to fall within the 100-year flood plain. In 1995, the Mescalero Apaches narrowly defeated a proposal to store nuclear fuel rods on their Tularosa reservation temporarily. Wendell Chino, who led the Mescaleros since the early 1950s, supported the plan for the hundreds of millions of dollars he expected to receive for the tribe. Chino championed Indian sovereignty, and in his more than forty years of leadership, produced a record of success. His projects ranged from the Inn of the Mountain Gods (with an artificial lake that New Mexico authorities never sanctioned), Ski Apache, a bingo parlor, and numerous cases in which he demonstrated tribal sovereignty in contravention of state desires. From Chino's point of view, nuclear fuel rod storage was simply another form of economic development. The Mescalero people's objection to that idea saved an enormous fight that the state of New Mexico would have been hard pressed to win.[51]

The constellation of power and profit lined up behind the hazardous waste siting industry guaranteed that no dump proposal ever really died. Most slipped into abeyance as proponents waited for a more propitious moment. By 1996, at least three low-level dumps were planned for west Texas, prompting Sierra Blanca store owner Bill Addington to call the proposals an attempt to "turn West Texas into a national toilet." Opponents rallied, headed by the Sierra Blanca Legal Defense Fund

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[49] Sandia Laboratories, *Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, Eddy County, New Mexico*, 1-10-1-14; Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation?*, 190-94.

[50] Jeff Wheelwright, "For Our Nuclear Waste, there's Gridlock on the Road to the Dump," *Smithsonian*, 40-49; Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation?*.

[51] Stephen Schmidt, "Natives and Nuke-Junk," November 13, 1991, Environmental News Service 2 #138; Bill Hume, "Apache Vote Spared State, Chino a Fight," *Albuquerque Journal* February 6, 1995, A-8; Ramon Bracamontes, "Texas Would Build Dump on Quake Site," *El Paso Times*, April 27, 1989.

(SBLDF). In November 1996, twenty-one opponents of the dump were certified as official participants in a hearing. Early in 1997, resistance seemed strong and ready, but the forces arrayed in favor of the dump possessed considerable power and influence as well.[52]

On the Mescalero reservation, the monitored storage proposal promoted by Chino made a comeback. After a vote that defeated the proposal, Fred Kaydahzinne, the housing director on the reservation, initiated a vigorous petition drive that forced a second ballot, in which advocates of the dump prevailed. Opponents charged that the petition drive was fraudulent because Kaydahzinne's office controlled more than 60 percent of the housing on the reservation and people felt compelled to sign the petition. Plans proceeded as opponents mustered energy and resources for another long battle.[53]

Efforts to site a nuclear waste dump in southeastern New Mexico and the trans-Pecos continued a long-standing economic pattern, the search for outside panacea; only its form had become more dangerous. Since the turn of the twentieth century, a series of panaceas had come to the region. Each in time was revealed as inadequate to fulfill economic or psychic needs of the area. Worse, the nuclear waste dumps perpetuated colonial patterns that infuriated residents. The federal waste to be stored at WIPP and on the Mescalero reservation came from all across the country. Thirty-three utilities, mostly on the East Coast, initially subscribed for the Mescalero site. The waste slated for West Texas storage originated on the East Coast as well. The converse of extractive industries, efforts to site such projects could be called "injections" to an unwilling region. Opposite in direction, they had the same effect: they placed southeastern New Mexico and the trans-Pecos at a disadvantage to the outside.

This backdrop complicated questions of park management and economic development in the region. The park provided a benign counterpart, one that, some argued inadvertently opened the region to other sometimes malevolent entreaties. The situation offered a reprise of the tensions of the turn of the century, of the public-private, East-West fissure that once threatened to break the nation apart. In the 1990s, regional interdependence was a foregone conclusion. The issues centered not on whether the outside would affect southeastern New Mexico, but in what ways that impact would occur and on the kind of input locals would retain into decisions that affected their future. For the National Park Service, this created a genuine dilemma — how to manage park resources in a climate in which the actions of other federal agencies created animosities toward federal endeavors. The Park Service was compelled to find a path through a complicated maze.

[52] J Truman, "Battle for Texas Nuke Dump," September 26, 1996; J Truman, "Desolate Real Estate — Critical National Importance," January 12, 1997, (Pocatello, ID: Downwinders Inc., 1997); Sierra Blanca Legal Defense Fund: Update 2 2 (Fall 1996).

[53] John Sterling, "Mescalero Dump Blocked . . . and Reborn," *Earth Island Journal* Summer 1995.